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2003
Field
Reviewer
Handbook

Learning
Opportunities
Grants

*For information, call
IMLS: (202) 606-8539
or e-mail: chenry@imls.gov
or rtrio@imls.gov*

Table of Contents

part 1

THE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES GRANTS REVIEW PROCESS

What is the Learning Opportunities Grants Program?	1
The Program Process	2
<i>How Are Applications Assigned to Field Review?</i>	2
<i>What Does IMLS Do with the Field Reviews?</i>	2
<i>How Does IMLS rank the applications?</i>	2
<i>What is the Role of the LOG Review Panel?</i>	3
<i>What happens before IMLS makes the Awards?</i>	3
<i>How are your Reviews used?</i>	4
<i>Can You Get Feedback on Your Performance?</i>	4

part 2

APPLICATION REVIEW INSTRUCTIONS

First Steps	5
<i>Qualities of a Good Proposal</i>	5
Check Shipping Box	5
Conflicts of Interest	5
Confidentiality	6
Application Completeness	6
Schedule of Completion	6
Schedule of Completion (Chart)	7

<i>part 3</i>	EVALUATING APPLICATIONS	
	Read and Post Evaluation Criteria	8
	Read Applications	9
	Address Funding Priorities	9
	Write Comments	9
	Sample Comments	9
	Good Comments	10
	Poor Comments	11
<i>part 4</i>	ASSIGNING SCORES	
	Scoring Definitions	12
<i>part 5</i>	REVIEW SHEETS	
	Sending Your Reviews to IMLS	13
<i>part 6</i>	FINAL STEPS	
	Sample Review Sheet Format	15

I. The LOG Review Process

Thank you for offering to serve as a Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) field reviewer. We have selected you to review this year's applications because of your expertise in museum programs and activities.

The staff at IMLS has prepared this handbook specifically for field reviewers. It will provide you with the technical information you need. Please use it in tandem with this year's *Learning Opportunities Grant Application and Guidelines*. Even if you have reviewed for other IMLS programs, you should review this booklet since LOG is a new grant offering.

WHAT IS THE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES GRANTS PROGRAM?

Learning Opportunities Grants will provide an opportunity for institutions to build their effectiveness in meeting their missions and furthering their strategic (i.e., institutional, long range, master) plans. Museums will be able to use Learning Opportunities funds to serve a wider and more diverse public through education, partnership and/or technology. Applicants will define how the funding relates to their institution's strategic agendas in the critical area of public service.

Learning Opportunities Grants are designed to be flexible. They can be used for ongoing museum activities; improvement of infrastructure; planning activities; new programs or activities; purchase of equipment or services; or other activities that will further the institution's commitment to one or more of the following strategic goals:

- Building public access
- Expanding educational services
- Reaching families and children
- Using technology more effectively in support of the above goals

IMLS sees Learning Opportunities Grants as investments grants, and expects that for institutions that receive them the funding will provide:

- Money that will make a difference over time
- Investment in capacity, not a one-time program
- Activities related to institutional strategic planning
- Focus on education and outreach
- Measurable outcomes

Eligible expenses include:

- Staffing
- Costs related to planning and maintenance of project partnerships
- Purchase of equipment or services
- Staff training
- Program development and implementation
- Exhibition design and fabrication
- Integration of technology into exhibition or educational programs
- Costs associated with evaluation of grant programs or activities

Questions about any information in this booklet?

Contact the IMLS Program Office at (202) 606-8539 or by e-mail at chenry@imls.gov or rrio@imls.gov between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

**THE
PROGRAM
PROCESS**

- 1) Applicants receive the grant application booklet; they complete the application form.
- 2) IMLS identifies a pool of available field reviewers. IMLS will assign three museum professionals to each application.
- 3) IMLS receives the applications and checks them for completeness.

HOW ARE APPLICATIONS ASSIGNED TO FIELD REVIEW?

- 4) The applications first are sorted into groups by strategic goals (building public access, expanding education, and serving families and children).

Then the applications are sorted within these groups by request amount (Funding Category 1 Requests between \$5,000-\$24,999; Funding Category 2 Requests between \$25,000-\$74,999; Funding Category 3 Requests between \$75,000-\$150,000).

Finally, budget sizes are determined within each of these divisions, based on the number of applications received.

The number of budget categories for each project type and request amount will depend on the number of applicants and the range of their budgets. We may ask you to review a museum with a budget size that is either smaller or larger than those with which you are most experienced; in such case, you should pay close attention to the museum's resources.

Each review group may contain applications of many disciplines. You are asked to review them based on their proposed project and its ties to their strategic plan.

- 5) Field reviewers receive the applications, evaluate them, and return their reviews to IMLS.

WHAT DOES IMLS DO WITH THE FIELD REVIEWS?

- 6) IMLS processes comments and scores.

Reviewers' scores are mathematically standardized to mitigate the effect of those who always use low or high scores. A single standardized score is produced from each reviewer for each application. This score is then used to rank the applications.

HOW DOES IMLS RANK THE APPLICATIONS?

- 7) Using a generally accepted mathematical formula – standard deviation – IMLS standardizes the scores and all applications.

The final standardized scores from the field reviewers for each application are averaged to produce one average standardized score. All applications are ranked based on the standardized average, from highest to lowest. This ranking will be used to determine which applications are sent to the review panel. The panel will make final recommendations based on the field review comments as well as their own expertise.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE LOG REVIEW PANEL?

- 8) The LOG Peer Review Panel meets to provide a second level of review and make final funding recommendations. There will be between three and nine panels assembled to evaluate the applications. We will ask the panels to look across the budget categories and make recommendations on the strongest applications, which are those that best serve the museum's strategic plan, are long-term investments in capacity, and have measurable outcomes.

The LOG review panel, made up of museum professionals, will meet in Washington, DC each June after the field review period. IMLS asks superior past reviewers to serve on the panel. Panelists represent a cross-section of museum disciplines, budget sizes, geographic regions and governing authorities.

IMLS will ask panel members about issues pertinent to this year's competition and about improving the LOG program, the application, and the process.

Following the field review and panel review, IMLS staff reports on the year's competition to the National Museum Services Board (the IMLS Presidentially appointed advisory board for museum programs).

WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE IMLS MAKES THE AWARDS?

- 9) IMLS reviews the financial/accounting information of each potential grantee.
- 10) IMLS awards the LOG grants. IMLS will make awards taking into account panel recommendations, and distribution of applications by:
- Strategic goal
 - Grant request
 - Institutional budget category

The Director of IMLS announces the awards in September. At that time, IMLS notifies all applicants by mail whether or not they have received an award. We also send a list of grantees to all participating reviewers.

With their notification, all applicants receive the reviews that their field reviewers and panelists completed. Museum staff can benefit tremendously from your thoughtful, constructive comments.

Questions about any information in this booklet?

Contact the IMLS Program Office at (202) 606-8539 or by e-mail at chenry@imls.gov or rtorio@imls.gov between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

HOW ARE YOUR REVIEWS USED?

Your scores will determine the ranking of applications—which will go to panel, and which will not.

For those applications that go to panel review, your reviews will provide the basis for the panel review, guiding panelists to the strong and weak aspects of the application. If a panel-reviewed application is not funded, your review comments, along with those of panelists, will assist the applicant as they consider whether/how to revise their application for resubmission.

For those applications that are not ranked highly enough to go to panel, field review feedback will be the only guide as they consider whether/how to revise their project for resubmission.

Successful applicants point to good scores and positive comments as a stamp of approval for their program proposals. Museum administrators report that receiving IMLS awards enhances fundraising success with private foundations or state and local sources.

HOW CAN YOU GET FEEDBACK ON YOUR PERFORMANCE?

Field reviewers will receive information about their performance from IMLS.

IMLS will mail you feedback on your performance as a field reviewer regarding your strengths and weaknesses. You will receive this information in October. Upon receiving your evaluation we invite you to call the IMLS Office of Museum Services to discuss your evaluation.

We greatly appreciate the tremendous amount of time and effort you have committed to being a reviewer. By participating in the peer review process, you are making a significant contribution to the Learning Opportunities Grant program and are providing an invaluable service to the entire museum community. Thanks!

II. Application Review Instructions

FIRST STEPS

This section of the handbook contains detailed information on how to review a LOG application. If you think that you may not be able to review every proposal you have received, do not begin the review process. Instead contact IMLS at once and notify the appropriate staff contact.

QUALITIES OF A GOOD PROPOSAL

A good LOG proposal should:

- Strengthen the capacity for education and public service
- Advance the institution's strategic agenda
- Be an investment for the future, not one-time activities with no long term institutional impact

CHECK SHIPPING BOX

If you haven't already done so, refer to the contents on the Reviewer Checklist. Contact IMLS immediately if any of the items listed are missing.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Read through your list of applications to see if there are any potential conflicts of interest. You have a conflict if:

- You, your spouse, or minor child are involved with the applicant institution, or in the project described in the application, as a paid consultant or through other financial involvement.
- The application is presented on behalf of an institution with which you, your spouse or minor child are negotiating future employment.
- Through prior association as an employee or officer, you have gained knowledge of the applicant which could preclude objective review of its application. (Past employment does not by itself disqualify you, as long as you can review objectively.)

Other conflicts may arise if you have served as a consultant or member of an accreditation team for an applicant institution or have recently applied for a position at an applicant institution. We rely on you to determine if you can objectively review an application.

Once you have reviewed an application, you should never represent the applicant (concerning the application, or any grant that may result from it) in dealings with the Institute of Museum and Library Services or another federal agency.

Please read and sign the Conflict of Interest form and return it with your reviews.

Questions about any information in this booklet?

Contact the IMLS Program Office at (202) 606-8539 or by e-mail at chenry@imls.gov or rrio@imls.gov between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information contained in grant applications is strictly confidential. Do not discuss or reveal names, institutions' project activities, or any other information contained in the applications. Contact IMLS if you have any questions concerning an application – do not contact an applicant directly.

**APPLICATION
COMPLETENESS**

Check your application to make sure that all required information is included. We only check the original copy for completeness. *If any application appears to be incomplete, contact IMLS immediately.*

**SCHEDULE
OF
COMPLETION**

The chart that is included presents a week-by-week guide to completing the review process. You may want to use this chart as a model for your own schedule.

FOUR-WEEK SCHEDULE OF COMPLETION

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
ACTIVITY 1	<p>Check box for all materials; read contract; check each application for completeness—if problems, contact Robert Trio at IMLS by phone at 202/606-8659 or by e-mail at rrtrio@imls.gov</p>			
ACTIVITY 2		<p>Read: <i>Reviewer Handbook</i>, <i>LOG Application and Guidelines</i> booklet</p>		
ACTIVITY 3		<p>Evaluation of applications: 1st read to develop feel for range of responses</p>		
ACTIVITY 4			<p>2nd read —thorough— write comments and assign scores</p>	
ACTIVITY 5			<p>Review comments and scores; adjust as necessary</p>	
ACTIVITY 6				<p>Return/Submit Application Reviews</p>
ACTIVITY 7				<p>Complete and return Reviewer Questionnaire</p>
ACTIVITY 8				<p>Keep applications & your copies of review sheets until October 1, and then destroy</p>

III. Evaluating Applications

IMLS asks you to express your professional judgement of each proposal in the following three ways: (1) Assess if the proposal addresses the stated strategic goals; (2) Write comments for each criterion; and (3) Assign a numerical score to each criterion. Note that comments that support your scores are *required*.

Your judgement should reflect how well you think the information provided in each proposal addresses the goals stated for criteria in LOG.

READ AND POST EVALUATION CRITERIA

Please use the LOG Evaluation Criteria poster as a reference. Listed below are the seven criteria of the narrative section.

1. GRANT PROGRAM GOALS

Degree to which the project or program addresses one or more of the following strategic goals:

- Building public access
- Expanding educational services
- Reaching families and children
- Using technology more effectively in support of the above goals

2. STRATEGIC PLAN - MISSION AND FINANCES

Evidence that the museum's strategic (i.e., institutional, long range, master) plan had community, board, and staff involvement, and supports the goals and needs of the both the museum and its community. Evidence that the planning activities of the museum also ensure the long term financial stability of the museum (please note: a required attachment is financial statement or audits for the applicant's two previous fiscal years prior to application.)

3. PROJECT - HOW THE PROJECT FITS INTO STRATEGIC PLAN AND MISSION

Evidence that the project or activities fit into and further the institution's strategic (i.e., institutional, long range, master) plan and mission. Extent to which the project is of sufficient scope to effect systemic change within the organization and/or expand institutional capacity to carry out the above strategic goals.

4. PROJECT - APPROPRIATENESS FOR INSTITUTION, AUDIENCE

Evidence that the project designers have identified an audience, performed a formal or informal assessment of their needs, and have designed this project as the best solution to answer those needs.

5. PROJECT - DESIGN

Extent to which the project proposes efficient, effective, and successful approaches to accomplish clear goals and objectives. If technology purchase is requested, extent to

which it will support the project or activity goals, and further the institution's strategic plan. If partnerships are supported by the grant, evidence that all partners are active contributors to and beneficiaries of the partnership activities.

6. PROJECT -RESOURCES: TIME & BUDGET

Evidence that the project activities will be effectively completed, that the applicant institution is capable of carrying out the project to its successful conclusion through the deployment and management of resources including money, facilities, equipment, and supplies, and that financial management will be sound. Appropriateness and cost efficiency of budget to complete project activities.

7. PROJECT -RESOURCES: PERSONNEL

Evidence that the project personnel are qualified to accomplish project goals and activities. Extent to which personnel commit adequate time to manage and implement the project activities. Extent to which personnel demonstrate appropriate experience and expertise in the specific area the project addresses.

READ APPLICATIONS

Read your applications to develop a feel for a range of responses. Take notes as you read.

ADDRESS FUNDING PRIORITIES

For LOG, IMLS is looking for projects that support the mission statement and strategic plan, and are investment grants, not one-time activities with no long term institutional impact. As a reviewer, you are reviewing how well designed the project is, how well the application will address its stated goals, and how the proposal addresses the funding priorities.

WRITE COMMENTS

Insert the diskette into your computer and access the Comment and Scoring sheet. Please type comments on a computer.

SAMPLE COMMENTS

The next few pages contain sample field review comments. Those comments labeled as "good" comments, based on evidence provided in the application, are substantive, tactful, and helpful to the evaluation.

Questions about any information in this booklet?

Contact the IMLS Program Office at (202) 606-8539 or by e-mail at chenry@imls.gov or rtio@imls.gov between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

**GOOD
COMMENTS**

Some of the characteristics of good comments are:

- Presented in a constructive manner
- Concise, specific, easy to read and understand
- Specific to the individual applicant
- Correlate with the score that is given
- Acknowledge the resources of the institution
- Reflect the application's strengths and identifies areas for improvement
- Directed to applicants for their use

Remember, both successful and unsuccessful applicants use your comments to improve their institutions and future applications.

Each of the sample comments listed below is followed by an explanation of its good characteristics.

Project – How the Project Fits into Strategic Plan and Mission: “This project goes hand-in-hand with the museum’s strategic plan and mission statement. This project will directly go to improving the membership base and provide better access to the community.”

(Provides a good explanation of how this project fits into the strategic plan)

Project – Resources: Time & Budget: “The Budget is realistic for the numbers of participants, and for the compensation of consultants and the number of hours for their assistance for this project.”

(Provides specific information)

Additional Comments: “Addresses an area of critical concern for your museum, but a major barrier exists: More evidence of institutional support is required – their commitment is not clear in this application.”

(Identifies strengths and areas for improvements)

POOR COMMENTS

Listed below are sample “poor” comments. Comments that are poor are considered vague, irrelevant, insensitive, or unclear. These comments actually hinder the evaluation process rather than help it. They are not helpful to either panelists or applicants.

To avoid making poor comments, DO NOT:

- Penalize an applicant because you feel the institution doesn’t need the money – remember any eligible institution may receive LOG funds, regardless of need.
- Penalize an applicant because of missing materials. If you are missing required materials, please contact IMLS *immediately*.
- Make derogatory remarks – offer suggestions for improvement rather harsh criticism.
- Question an applicant’s honesty or integrity. You may question the accuracy of information provided by the applicant, but if you are unsure how to raise your question, contact IMLS.
- Offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information – your comments should concern only the information IMLS requests of applicants.

Each of the sample poor comments listed below is followed by an explanation of why it is a poor comment.

Strategic plan – Mission and Finances: “Good job – the project follows a plan.”
(Vague)

Project – Design: “The project uses technology.”
(Vague)

Personnel: “The project personnel seem to be well qualified, but this institution does not have a good reputation.”
(Insensitive and irrelevant)

Project – Resources: Time & Budget: “I might question some parts of the budget, but they probably know what they are doing.”
(Vague, not evaluative, and irrelevant)

Project – How the Project fits into Strategic Plan and Mission: “This is clearly not the highest priority that the museum has. They should be focusing on educational outreach and not collections management.”
(Not the reviewer’s job to determine the museum’s priorities)

Questions about any information in this booklet?

Contact the IMLS Program Office at (202) 606-8539 or by e-mail at chenry@imls.gov or rtorio@imls.gov between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

IV. Assigning Scores

After you have written comments for each applicant criterion, you will assign a score. To help applicants understand and benefit from your reviews, make sure that your scores accurately reflect your written comments. If you have any questions, contact IMLS.

- Read the LOG Scoring Definitions below for a description for each of each of the seven scores
- Assign a score from 1 to 7 to each of the seven project criteria
- Assign a score that correlates with your comments and is, in your judgement, appropriate

SCORING DEFINITIONS

- 1 Applicant's response demonstrates an unsatisfactory discussion of this criterion and does not address their strategic goals and/or present a sustainable solution.
- 2 Applicant's response demonstrates some effort to discuss this criterion, but indicates a need for considerable improvement in addressing their strategic goals and/or presenting a sustainable solution.
- 3 Applicant's response demonstrates a considerable effort to discuss the criterion, but indicates the need for some improvement in addressing their strategic goals and/or presenting a sustainable solution.
- 4 Applicant's response meets this criterion, but does not indicate any additional merit.
- 5 Applicant's response meets this criterion and indicates additional merit in meeting their strategic goals in a sustainable way.
- 6 Applicant's response exceeds this criterion and indicates considerable additional merit in meeting their strategic goals in a sustainable way.
- 7 Applicant's response is exceptional for this criterion, and demonstrates a model for meeting their strategic goals in a sustainable way.

IMPORTANT

- Assign only whole numbers to each of the seven narrative responses
- Do not use fractions, decimals, zeros or more than one number in scoring individual sections
- Score all responses; do not leave any blank

V. Sending Your Reviews to IMLS

- 1) Place diskette in computer, and download form for IMLS review sheets and the Reviewer Questionnaire. These are provided in a Word format, and in a .txt format. If you cannot read either of these versions, please contact IMLS for technical assistance.
- 2) Complete a Comment and Scoring sheet for each institution you review.
- 3) Indicate the application number on each review sheet. This information is located on the upper right hand side of each application.
- 4) Make sure to include a comment and a score for each of the seven criteria for each application.
- 5) Then make two copies of your review sheet files, one with your reviewer number and name on the bottom (IMLS Copies), and one without this information (Applicant Copies).
- 6) Save one copy of the file of your completed review sheets on your computer.
- 7) Complete Reviewer Questionnaire.
- 8) If you are faxing your review sheets, print out both sets of review sheets (with reviewer name and number, and without) and the completed Reviewer Questionnaire; then fax both sets and the questionnaire to IMLS at (202) 606-0010.
- 9) If you are e-mailing your review sheets, attach both sets of review sheets (with reviewer name and number, and without) and the completed Reviewer Questionnaire; then send them in an e-mail to IMLS at museumreviewers@imls.gov
- 10) If you cannot send the reviews to IMLS in either of the above mentioned electronic formats, please contact us at (202) 606-8539 for alternate instructions.

Questions about any information in this booklet?

Contact the IMLS Program Office at (202) 606-8539 or by e-mail at chenry@imls.gov or rtorio@imls.gov between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

VI. Final Step

Keep your copies of the applications and your copies of the Comment and Scoring sheets you have reviewed on file until October 1 and then destroy them.

Thank You for Serving as a LOG Field Reviewer!

SAMPLE

LOG Application Comment and Scoring Sheet

Applicant: _____

Log Number: _____

EVALUATION CHECKLIST

- For the description of each of the criteria, see the Evaluation Criteria poster
- In the space after “Comments” under the score line for each criterion write a comment to express your professional judgment. Include page citations from the proposal to justify your comments where appropriate.
- Assign a score to each criterion using the rating guide below. Use only whole numbers. Do not use zeros, fractions or decimals, or more than one number.
- Compute the total of the scores for all criteria and enter in the space provided.

RATING GUIDE

Use the Rating Guide below in scoring each of the evaluation criteria.

Scoring Definitions

- 1 Applicant’s response demonstrates an unsatisfactory discussion of this criterion and does not address their strategic goals and/or present a sustainable solution.
- 2 Applicant’s response demonstrates some effort to discuss this criterion, but indicates a need for considerable improvement in addressing their strategic goals and/or presenting a sustainable solution.
- 3 Applicant’s response demonstrates a considerable effort to discuss the criterion, but indicates the need for some improvement in addressing their strategic goals and/or presenting a sustainable solution.
- 4 Applicant’s response meets this criterion, but does not indicate any additional merit.
- 5 Applicant’s response meets this criterion and indicates additional merit in meeting their strategic goals in a sustainable way.
- 6 Applicant’s response exceeds this criterion and indicates considerable additional merit in meeting their strategic goals in a sustainable way.
- 7 Applicant’s response is exceptional for in this criterion, and demonstrates a model for meeting their strategic goals in a sustainable way.

Questions about any information in this booklet?

Contact the IMLS Program Office at (202) 606-8539 or by e-mail at chenry@imls.gov or rtorio@imls.gov between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

Applicant _____

LOG Number _____

Evaluation Criteria

Criterion 1. Grant Program Goals

Score: _____

Comments:

Criterion 2. Strategic Plan – Mission and Finances

Score: _____

Comments:

Criterion 3. Project – How the Project Fits into
Strategic Plan and Mission

Score: _____

Comments:

Criterion 4. Project – Appropriateness for Institution, Audience

Score: _____

Comments:

Criterion 5. Project – Design

Score: _____

Comments:

Criterion 6. Project – Resources: Time & Budget

Score: _____

Comments:

Criterion 7. Project – Resources: Personnel

Score: _____

TOTAL SCORE: _____

Applicant _____

LOG Number _____

Additional Comments

Use this space to write additional comments or suggestions for the applicant that can help to improve the proposal for future submission or to carry out project goals in other ways.

FUNDING PRIORITIES

Did the project address one or more of the priorities listed for its category?
Circle the appropriate response:

YesNo

Printed Reviewer Name _____

Panel #

Questions about any information in this booklet?

Contact the IMLS Program Office at (202) 606-8539 or by e-mail at chenry@imls.gov or rtorio@imls.gov between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday.